



COOPERATIVE EXTENSION SERVICE
UNIVERSITY OF MAINE

AGRONOMY REPORTS

WATER ~ KEY TO SUCCESS OF NEWLY SEEDED LAWNS

The roadblock to the successful establishment of a new lawn is the lack of water. Although Maine is blessed with a climate that provides good rainfall distribution, seldom can we depend on the weatherman to supply all the water needed for newly seeded turf. Lack of water causes far more seeding failures than any other problem.

Keep the Soil Moist

Once a turf area has been seeded, the soil surrounding the seed should be kept moist. If you have been successful in getting all of your seed placed in the upper .5 inch of soil. It's important that you keep the soil, to a depth of at least one inch, moist until the seed germinates. Since it takes only a few hours of sunshine (or wind) to dry the upper inch of soil, a daily supply of water is required. Thus, on any day that it doesn't rain, irrigation will probably be needed.

Eliminate The Wet – Dry Cycle

Without irrigation, the situation often arises where a good soaking rain will provide enough water to get the germination process under way. Following this initial start, it may be a week before another rainstorm occurs. The partially germinated seed is completely dried out, during this rainless period, and the growth cycle stops. After two or three of these "start-stop" cycles, the seed (or young plant) loses the ability to develop. Once the germination process begins, it becomes critical to supply enough water to allow the process to continue without interruption.

Evening Watering Helps

Late afternoon or early evening is probably the most desirable time to apply water to new turf areas. From 6 PM until 8 the next morning very little of the applied water will evaporate. It will be mid-afternoon before the soil surface has dried out and it will then be near time for the next irrigation. Within this watering sequence, the germinating seeds never really get dry.

Increasing Watering Depth As Grass Starts Growing

The objective during germination is to keep the seeds moist. To do this, you need to keep the moisture only in the surface inch of soil. However, as the grass starts growing, you should apply enough water to wet the soil to a depth of 4 to 6 inches. This deeper watering pattern will encourage good root penetration. As growth starts, you can apply water less often, but you will need to apply more water at each watering. By the time the new lawn has been mowed three times, the area should do well without irrigation.

Equipment

Obviously the size of the area involved will have some impact on the equipment needed. Equipment that puts out a relatively fine stream of water will prevent excessive soils movement when the water strikes the ground. You also want to be sure that your system doesn't put out water faster than the soil can absorb it. Personally, I have found the perforated sprinkler hose a very adequate system for home lawn areas.

Prepared by Vaughn H. Holyoke, Extension Crops Specialist 3 / 79